

Mercenaries for Hire

By MIKE ROYKO

Col. Robert K. Brown and two buddies were sitting around the kitchen table making macho talk.

Brown, 51, isn't a full-time colonel. It's a reserve rank. But everybody at his thriving magazine — *Soldier of Fortune* — calls him colonel.

He likes that, of course, because he is a macho guy and puts out one of the most macho magazines in America.

It's directed at professional mercenaries — men who will fight for pay and those who want to hire them. And, indeed, it does carry ads by men who claim to be mercenaries offering their services.

A recent issue included these ads. "Ex-USAF fighter pilot for hire. Ready for action!" "Qualified personnel for rescue or special assignment missions outside states. Prefer Central or South America. Bounty hunting in states." "Merc for hire anywhere. Don't get mad, get even."

But since mercenaries represent only a tiny portion of the reading population, the magazine tries to broaden its appeal to include those who might be called war-fans, weapon-lovers, fanatic anti-commies, and Walter Mitty types who just enjoy the vicarious thrill of reading about blood and guts.

Col. Brown and his kitchen-table buddies were talking about a flight to El Salvador that Brown was to make the next day. Brown, who was a captain in Vietnam, claims to be helping train the Salvadoran army on an unofficial basis. He says he is making them tougher and more disciplined.

Toughness, Ferocity Vital

Toughness and ferocity are an important part of the magazine's appeal. Besides the mercenary ads, the magazine carries an amazing assortment of ads for unusual methods of murdering, maiming or terrifying somebody you dislike. A few examples:

"Deadliest Fighting System! The feared and formidable Chinese Black Cobra Style of oriental combat. A killing and mutilating art with advanced dynamic meditations . . ."

"Secrets of the Ninja . . . Ninja principles of invisibility, covert entry, escape and evasion, assassination, sentry removal, meditation, mind clouding and much more."

"How To Get Anything on Anybody . . . Get the goods on others like they're getting the goods on you . . . Here are expert ways to secretly bug any target . . ."



Mike Royko

And the usual assortment of deadly single blow guns, combat knives, brass knuckles, machetes and killer dogs.

As the evening wore on toward midnight, one of Brown's buddies — who writes for the magazine — took out an automatic pistol he was carrying and showed it to Brown. Naturally, the three are all gun experts and gun-lovers, and in Colorado, where Brown lives and works, there are virtually no gun laws.

Guns are a big part of Brown's magazine, both in stories and ads. Maybe the biggest part. They review guns the way some publications review books and movies. Except there is little concern for their entertainment value, and great concern for the speed with which they fire and the size holes they will make in their target.

Ads for All Guns

So you can find ads for tiny handguns, sniper rifles, semi-automatics, machine guns, and silencers, in case you don't want to disturb the neighbors.

Brown's buddy talked about his pistol's heft, the trigger action and the other qualities that please gun lovers. He pulled the trigger. Being a gun expert, he knew it was empty.

Naturally, Brown considers anybody who favors handgun controls to be wimpy pinkos or worse. And his magazine reflects that view. You can find ads for posters and T-shirts that say things like: "Gun control is being able to hit your target."

As the magazine has explained many times, there is no problem when guns are used by responsible people who know how to use them safely.

When Brown's buddy, a gun expert, pulled the trigger, there was a loud explosion. He stood there for a moment with his mouth wide open. Then he looked at his hand. He saw a hole. He had shot a hole right through his hand.

Col. Brown looked down at his leg. His leg hurt. He saw blood running out of his calf. The bullet, after blowing a hole in the buddy's hand, had blown a hole in Col. Brown's leg. The owner of the gun was right — it did pack a wallop.

Brown looked at his bleeding leg. Then he looked at his buddy and said: "You stupid son of a bitch, you shot me. And now I can't go to El Salvador!"

So they went to a hospital instead.

Oh, well, I'm sure there are people in El Salvador who can teach the troops how to be shot in the leg.

The Weather

Windy, snow mixed with rain today; flurries likely tonight. Cloudy, chance of flurries Friday. Highs, 38-40°; low tonight, near 30°.

Details on Page 2.

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